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RETURN OR RESTITUTION OF CULTURAL PROPERTY TO THE COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

Letter dated 12 November 1993 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Yugoslavia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions of my Government, I have the honour to write to you in regard to the statement of the representative of Croatia made in the plenary of the General Assembly on 2 November 1993 on agenda item 21 (Return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin). That statement contains a series of untrue facts and false accusations, directed against the Serbs of Krajina, but also against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Republic of Serbia. In the interest of truth, I wish to point out the following:

It is true that the museums, museum collections, libraries, archives and sacral facilities were heavily damaged in Vukovar. Some of the artifacts were irretrievably lost, while some were exposed to weather erosion and possible illegal usurpation. That was the reason why the authorities of Krajina authorized, in accordance with their law on protection of cultural heritage and the international provisions of UNESCO concerning the protection of cultural property in areas affected by war, temporary dislocation of movable cultural assets and their adequate protection and storage in the territory of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The competent authorities of the Republic of Serbia were asked to undertake any measures deemed necessary to repair or protect those assets.

The expert teams from various institutes and museums for the protection of cultural heritage from Belgrade and Novi Sad evacuated museum pieces from the ruins of Vukovar and placed them in the storage facilities in Belgrade, Novi Sad and Dalj. Some of them have been left adequately protected in the town of Vukovar itself.

UNESCO has been duly informed of those activities. All evacuated pieces have been properly filed and listed. The lists were verified by heads of the teams or the representatives of local authorities and the copies have been submitted to several institutions. The Institute for International Scientific, Cultural, Educational and Technical Cooperation of the Republic of Serbia has opened a separate file in its computer centre and all relevant data are easily available.

Mr. Munir Bushnaki, a high-ranking UNESCO official, had the opportunity to see one of those teams on site and was informed of the difficulties encountered.

In addition to the evacuation of museum pieces, experts surveyed and evaluated damage inflicted on monuments and open-air objects. A copy of the study was also transmitted to UNESCO through Mr. Bushnaki. All evacuated pieces and the relevant lists are fully at the disposal of representatives of UNESCO.

All assets shall be returned to their localities as soon as technical and safety conditions are created, without any prejudice to political solutions. Until those conditions are created, the articles shall be under the care of the restorers and shall undergo restoration if necessary.

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia remains open to any cooperation with UNESCO concerning further protection and restoration of the above-mentioned cultural assets. Any expert or material assistance by UNESCO or any other international specialized agency in the field of cultural heritage protection shall be most welcome.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under agenda item 21.

(Signed) Dragomir DJCKIĆ
Ambassador
Chargé d'affaires a.i.